

WOMANHOOD IN NICHOLAS SPARKS'S *THE BEST OF ME*

Melania

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945, Indonesia

melaniapoo17@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: Melania

ABSTRACT

This study entitled "Womanhood in Nicholas Sparks's *The Best of Me*" is a study that focuses on the womanhood exposed in the main female character, which is described through the narratives and dialogues in this novel. The study adopts the theory of feminist literary criticism by Kolodny (1997), womanhood by Millett (1969), French (1986), and Dworkin (1987). This study applies qualitative research to find and understand the description in Nicholas Sparks's *The Best Of Me*. The approach uses intrinsic and extrinsic approaches. The intrinsic approach is used to analyze and interpret the main female character in the novel *The Best of Me* by Nicholas Sparks, which focuses on women. The Extrinsic approach is used to analyze the character in the view of feminist literary criticism, as reflected in the novel *The Best of Me* by Nicholas Sparks. The data are taken from *The Best of Me* novel, which is written by Nicholas Sparks. The study finds that the characteristics of the main female character which is: Amanda is wise, caring, and patient. The womanhood in this novel is interpreted as a woman's role in her life. Womanhood is exposed in three forms: responsibilities toward their parents as a daughter; responsibilities toward their husbands as a wife; and their responsibility toward children as a mother. The purpose of this study is to examine the roles and responsibilities of being a woman in life, such as being a daughter, a wife, and a mother.

Keywords: *Womanhood, Feminist Literary Criticism, Motherhood*

1. INTRODUCTION

Every woman has big expectations for her life, such as having a beautiful face, being educated and knowledgeable, being an independent and strong woman in society, being able to make her own money to fulfill her life, then having a harmonious family by being able to be a good wife to her husband and being a strong and loving mother to her children. To conclude that puberty is what makes a girl a woman is to suggest that reproductive capacity is the essential aspect of womanhood. (Chrisler, 2013).

Womanhood is how a woman lives after she goes through childhood, puberty and adolescence (Richard: 2010). Womanhood can also be interpreted as the role of a woman in life. When a baby girl is born, a girl will become a woman in the future. The roles of a woman in life include being a daughter, being a wife, and being a mother. The majority of scholarship devoted to how womanhood is defined has primarily done so through the lens of femininity, or what is commonly referred to as hegemonic femininity (Chaney, 2011). Under 'hegemony', members of a particular social group or class mirror the views that are most prevalent in society (Connell, 2002; Dyer, 1993), and 'femininity' is a socially constructed standard for women's appearance, demeanor and values' (Bordo, 1993: 316).

Some people think that higher education is not necessary, especially for women. The assumption is that a woman does not need higher education because she will only end up in the kitchen and raising children. Then being a wife and mother is also part of womanhood. When they grow up, women will marry the man of their choice and love each other. They will build a harmonious household. Meanwhile, women with higher education have different perspectives when they are married. The way of thinking of educated women will also be formed which will also be implemented indirectly in educating children. Other studies have defined womanhood in terms of the ability of females to provide for their own needs, specifically in regards to personal responsibility for their independence, self-reliance and agency (Emerson, 2002).

The Best of Me is a very interesting novel by Nicolas Sparks. This novel not only provides a story about the love story of the main character, but also provides an overview and lessons about womanhood to the reader through the main female character. The purpose of this study is the writer wants to examine how the roles and responsibilities of being a woman in life such as being a daughter, being a wife, and being a mother.

Womanhood is the period in a human female's life after she has passed through childhood, puberty, and adolescence (Richard, 2010). During the second wave of feminism, it was argued that woman simply meant a biologically female adult human. Feminists (Millett, 1969; French, 1986; Dworkin, 1987) made the case that womanhood could and should exist purely as a biological category, unfettered by the feminine gender role – a vision of women's liberation. Categories women's responsibilities into three types: responsibilities towards their husbands; responsibilities towards their children; and their responsibility towards others (Rahbari, 2020).

2. METHOD

This study uses an intrinsic and extrinsic approach. Intrinsic approach is used to analyze the characters in the novel *The Best of Me* by Nicholas Sparks which focuses on women. The intrinsic element is to describe, analyze and interpret the main female character in the novel. Extrinsic elements are used to analyze the character in the view of feminist literary criticism as reflected in the novel *The Best of Me* by Nicholas Sparks.

This study applies qualitative research to find and understand description in Nicholas Sparks's novel *The Best of Me*. Qualitative research is empirical research where the data are not in the form of numbers (Punch, 1998). This method is relevant for this research because it is appropriate to explain the womanhood represented by the main character Amanda Collier in the Nicholas Sparks's novel *The Best of Me*.

The data of this research is taken from the novel *Te Best of Me* by Nicholas Sparks as the primary data source. *The Best of Me* is published first in 2011 by Grand Central Group. It includes 318 pages. In data collection, the writer collects data by reading novels as the main source of data. The data is taken from the novel *The Best of Me* by Nicholas. Then the writer watched movie *The Best of Me*, and the last writer identifies and analyzes the data.

The instrument in this research is the writer as the data collector and data analyzer.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Amanda's Role as a Daughter

The Best of Me tells the story of Amanda Collier in her teens. Amanda is a popular belle in her town. Besides Amanda has a beautiful face and has a kind heart that makes her popular, Amanda is the daughter of Evelyn Collier. The Collier family is a rich family and is respected by the Oriental community. It is seen in the following quotation.

She was popular, the kind of girl who sat surrounded by friends at a table in the cafeteria while boys vied for her attention, and she was not only class president but a cheerleader as well. (Sparks, 2011: 21)

Another point of view that shows that Amanda is a woman who cares about her education is when Amanda accepted at Duke University. It is seen in the following quotation.

The following week Amanda moved into the dorms at Duke University, and a month after that Dawson was arrested.” (Sparks, 2011: 26)

The statement above shows that Amanda really cares about her education. Because being an educated woman is very important for her future. So far, women have always been labeled as weak and less knowledgeable than men. Therefore women must go to school, women must equip themselves with knowledge to become strong and equal in society. In addition, being an educated woman is a form of gratitude and respect from Amanda to her parents.

Amanda's parents always wanted the best for her. Including providing the best education. Another point of view that shows that Amanda's parents wanted the best for her.

... She told Amanda that if she continued to see Dawson, she would have to move out of the house in September and start paying her own bills, and they wouldn't pay for her to attend college, either. “Why should we waste money on collage when you're throwing your life away?” (Sparks, 2011: 25)

The quotation above shows that Amanda's parents give her a choice. Her parents just wanted to make her think carefully. Whether she chooses her parents and leave Dawson or would she choose Dawson and leave her parents. Honestly, Amanda's parents love her so much. They don't want to see their daughter suffer in the future just because she wasted her youth dating the wrong guy. Every parent have high expectations for their children, especially for their daughter. They hope their children will have a good life in the future, so they will do anything for the best of their daughter.

Even though Amanda is married and has a family, Amanda is still devoted to her parents. Amanda always shows her care for her parents.

When my dad was alive, they used to visit us because of the kids. But after my dad died, it got harder. My mom never liked to drive, so now I have to come here.” (Sparks, 2011: 60)

The quotation above shows that when her father died, her mother lived alone in Oriental. Being the only daughter then, only Amanda is owned by her mother. Amanda doesn't want to be a

disobedient daughter who abandons her mother. So Amanda visits her mother a few times a year to ensure she is okay and stays with her for some time.

In essence, in the family, if a son is a potential leader and successor for his family, then a daughter gives love and warmth to her family. The daughter will always make the atmosphere in the family more comfortable and harmonious. The daughter is the first to feel when her parents are sick. The daughter will pay more attention if her parents or siblings feel alone and lonely because the daughter symbolizes affection and love in the family.

3.2 Amanda's Role as a Wife

A married woman will give everything she has for her husband. Love, loyalty, time all she gave to serve her husband. Because a good wife is a devoted wife to her husband, and a wife's job is to support all decisions made by her husband, always support what her husband does as long as it's right. Provide opinions and suggestions for husband's problems both at work or in the community and always provide comfort for husbands when in the family. Amanda's sacrifice and love as a wife is shown in the statement below.

After paying the bills, they were lucky if they had enough money left over to rent a movie on the weekend. Dinners out were rare, and when their car died, Amanda found herself stranded in the house for a month, until they could afford to get it fixed. As stressful and exhausting as those years had sometimes been, when she thought back on her life, she also knew they'd been some of the happiest years of their marriage. (Sparks, 2011: 31)

The quotation above shows that Amanda is a woman who respects her husband. She obeyed her husband. When her husband decides to live a successful life and build his own household without the help of his parents. Amanda is always there to accompany and pay attention to her husband. Even though it was a little stressful and tiring, Amanda remained behind her husband to support her husband's career and that was what made Amanda feel happy in her marriage.

It is almost twenty years of Amanda and Frank's marriage at the time. In a marriage there are always ups and downs. There is always happiness that comes and sadness that comes. But at the end of ten years Amanda and Frank's marriage got trials and difficulties. Everything changes when Bea, their third child, dies.

But losing Bea had changed them. For Amanda, it spurred a passionate commitment to her volunteer work at the hospital; Frank, on the other hand, changed from someone who drank occasionally into a full blown alcoholic. (Sparks, 2011: 31)

The quotation above shows that both Amanda and Frank are devastated by the loss of Bea. But when Amanda starts to let it go and wants to start life again with her husband and three other children, Frank is still stuck in chaos and time is turning for the worse. This is what makes Amanda's role as a wife tested.

When the family is in trouble, a wife will try to find a way out of the problem. Not only husband, a wife will also sacrifice anything for her family. The patience of a woman or a wife cannot be measured

when her family is in trouble. Especially when a wife tries to wake her husband from the shackles that bind him.

And if alcoholism was a disease, didn't that mean he needed her help, or at least her loyalty? How, then, was she-his wife, who'd taken a vow to remain with him in sickness and in health-supposed to justify ending the marriage and breaking up their family, after everything they had been through? (Sparks, 2011:34)

The quotation above shows that Amanda does not want to destroy her household just because Frank becomes an alcoholic, Amanda wants to help her husband recover, get rid of alcoholism and can live a normal life like before. Amanda really regretted this problem because it was very difficult to bring Frank back to his senses.

Physically men are always strong and women are always weak, but emotionally women are much stronger than men. This relates to what happened to Amanda and Frank at this time, when their child died, Amanda and Frank were equally devastated. Because there are no parents who are ready when their child dies. However, because women are emotionally stronger, they can quickly rise from chaos. She feels sad but she can't stand it because there is another reason for her to get up which is life goes on and she still has other children who still need her. While Frank is having a hard time accepting reality, he is having a hard time getting up from his turmoil. This is shown in the statement below.

Frank adores our children. They're the center of his life, and I think that's why losing Bea was so hard on us. You have no idea how terrible it is to watch your child get sicker and sicker and know that there's nothing you can do to help her... feeling everything from anger at God to betrayal to a sense of utter failure and devastation. In the end though, I was able to survive the pain. Frank never really recovered. (Sparks, 2011: 169)

Being a wife is also responsible for maintaining peace and order in the household. So a wife must think wisely if she wants to make a decision. Because every problem needs discussion, it's not only about her but her husband and children as well that is family. Everything must be well thought out. Don't let this decision give you regrets in the future.

. A wife is the one to whom she turns for love, sympathy, understanding, comfort and recognition because a wife always does something with sincerity. A Wife will give her love when serving her husband. This is shown in the statement below.

Frank hadn't had a single beer or even a sip of wine since the day of the accident. At the hospital, he'd sworn he was stopping for good, and to his credit, he'd kept his vow. (Sparks,2011: 245)

There was no question that Jared and the girls had benefited from the improved atmosphere at home. There had even been moments recently when Amanda considered it a new beginning for her and Frank... Every Friday, they went on a date—another recommendation of the couples counselor—and while it still felt stilted at times, both of them knew it was important. (Sparks, 2011: 247)

3.3 Amanda's Role as a Mother

Amanda is a mother who loves her children very much. She raises her children on her own without the help of others or nannies. Amanda sacrificed her job in order to be able to care for and raise her children by giving full love to her children. It is seen in the following quotation, “but when Jared came along the following summer, she took a leave of absence. Lynn followed eighteen months later, and the leave of absence became permanent.” (Sparks, 2011: 26)

Being a mother must also be responsible for the habits of children's behavior, order, and honesty of children. The mother's job is to set a good example for her children so that children can follow the good behavior. Teach children also to always be honest and provide news so that the relationship will always be harmonious between mother and child. It is seen in the following quotation.

During the drive to oriental, both Jared and Lynn, her two older children, had called, and she'd been thankful for the distraction.” (Sparks, 2011: 20)

The quotation above shows that Amada often gets calls from her children or vice versa, Amanda will call her children to tell each other the news and situation

When parents, especially mothers, have been abandoned by their children, mothers will be more protective of their other children because that is the true nature of mothers who devote their time, energy and thoughts to the safety and welfare of their family members.

After Bea's death. Amanda became more protective to her children because it's like a fear in itself if the bad things that used to happen again. Amanda will really fall when she hears her child is hurt. This is shown through the following statement when Amanda got the news that her son had an accident.

Frank and Jared had been in an accident. The words scrolled through her mind like some terrible ticker tape, making Amanda more frantic with every passing minute. Her grip on the wheel was white knuckled as she flashed her lights again, then again, willing the car in front of her to allow her to pass. (Sparks, 2011: 221)

The quotation above shows that the instinct of a mother when she hears her child is injured will be very panicked and hurt too. A mother's love cannot be measured by anything. When her child is sick or injured, the mother will be ready to take the place of her sick child. And the anxiety of a mother for her child is no joke. Mother can feel when a family member is sick or injured.

A mother's mentality will be tested when her child is sick. She will do whatever it takes for her son's recovery. Anything will be sacrificed for the healing of her son. After all, a mother is the one who has given birth to her child. She couldn't bear to see her son in pain or worse. It shown through his conversation with the doctor.

“You’re not saying that he’s going to die, are you?” she whispered. “He can’t die. He’s young and healthy and strong. You have to do something.”

“We’re doing everything we can,” Dr. Mills said, sounding tired.

“Then do more!” she urged, half-pleading, half-shouting. “Take him to surgery, do what you have to do!”

“Surgery isn’t an option right now.”

“Just do what you have to do to save him!” Her voice rose and cracked. (Sparks, 2011:225)

In the quotation above, Amanda couldn't contain the excitement she was feeling. When she was told that her son was in critical condition and it was possible that Jared's life could not be saved. Amanda forced her will to force the doctor to do what was best for her child, even though she also knew that the doctor would do her best for the safety of her patient.

4. CONCLUSION

From what have been discussed in the previous chapters, the writer would like to give conclusion which is derived from the result of the analysis. It is about womanhood exposed in Amanda Collier. It shows the readers that it has Categorizes women’s responsibilities into three types: responsibilities towards their parents as a daughter like finishing school to college; responsibilities towards their husbands as a wife like give love, sympathy, understanding, and comfort to her husband; and their responsibility towards children as a mother namely to ensure the safety and health of children. And be a good role model.

This study hopefully contributes some insights of how womanhood exposed in a literary work. The writer hopes that this study can contribute useful insights for further literature research. Especially on understanding womanhood in literary work.

REFERENCES

- Alleyne, Richard (2010-06-13). "[Girls now reaching puberty before 10 – a year sooner than 20 years ago](#)". *Daily Telegraph*.
- Andrea Dworkin. (1987). *Intercourse*. New York: Free Press
- Chaney, C. (2011). The character of womanhood: How african american women’s perceptions of womanhood influence marriage and motherhood. *Ethnicities*, 11(4), 512–535. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796811415764>
- Chrisler, J. C. (2013). Womanhood is not as easy as it seems: Femininity requires both achievement and restraint. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 14(2), 117–120. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031005>
- Connell RW (2002) *Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Dyer R (1993) *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*. London: Routledge.
- Emerson RA (2002) ‘Where my girls at?’ Negotiating black womanhood in music videos. *Gender & Society* 16(1): 115–135.
- Kate Millett. (1969). *Sexual Politics*. Columbia: Columbia University Press
- Marilyn French. (1986). *Beyond Power: On Women, Men, and Morals*. California: Ballantine Books
- Punch, K.F. (1998) *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. Sage, London

Rahbari, L. (2020). Women's Ijtihad and Lady Amin's islamic ethics on womanhood and motherhood. *Religions*, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11020088>

Sparks, Nicholas. 2011. *The Best of Me*. United Stated: Grand Central Published.